World Chronicle

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DISARMAMENT

Disarmament has always played a major role in the work of the United Nations, but the increase in local and regional conflicts since the end of the Cold War have made this issue an urgent one. Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, United Nations' Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, discusses how we can get rid of both weapons of mass destruction, as well as small arms, in this episode of World Chronicle.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

"Weapons do not cause war, but excess of arms breeds mistrust, heightens tensions and leads to conflict," UN's Secretary-General said recently. He also underlined the importance of disarmament to the global agenda, and the fact that the United Nations has an essential role and primary responsibility in this field. One of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations, the maintenance of peace and security, depends upon the control of both weapons of mass destruction and the world's growing stockpile of conventional weapons.

Our guest today is Jayantha Dhanapala, UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. Among other posts, Mr. Dhanapala has previously been Director of the UN's Institute of Disarmament Research and as Sri-Lanka's Ambassador to the United States. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Dhanapala are Ian Williams of *The Nation* Anne Penketh of *Agence France-Presse*.

Mr. Dhanapala, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Ambassador Dhanapala, the end of the Cold War was supposed to bring a peace dividend for the economies of the world, both developing countries and developed countries. In the event that doesn't seemed to have happened -- the arms race is continuing, India and Pakistan have joined the nuclear club and there are other countries out there who apparently have the capability or the potential for becoming nuclear powers. Given the current situation in this field of arming rather than disarming, don't you have a very -- rather -- an uphill task in your present assignment.

DHANAPALA: I do and I have no illusions about it but what you have just described only vindicates the wisdom of the Secretary-General in including the re-establishment of the Department of Disarmament Affairs as an important element in his Reform Programme. Disarmament has always been a cold programme for the United Nations. It is not often realized that the very first resolution of the General Assembly was on disarmament and ...

LITTLEJOHNS: What did it say?

DHANAPALA: 1945 -- it called for general and complete disarmament and ...

LITTLEJOHNS: In 1945?

DHANAPALA: 1945 yes. This has become, therefore, a very important felt need of the International Community and although there was an assumption of the Cold War that the task of disarmament would be wrapped up very quickly and indeed that was probably why the

Department of Disarmament Affairs was dismantled in 1992, we have in fact seen a slight decline in military expenditure, but it is still running at some 140 billion dollars per annum which is about 125 dollars per head of population in the world. This is a lot of money. And if Article 26 of the Charter is to be taken seriously, it called for the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security, which you mentioned a while ago, with the least diversion of human and material resources, because those resources can be spent on the one billion odd people who are still below the poverty line. So we need to do a great deal of work. We still have 36,000 nuclear warheads and we have something like 500 million small arms floating around the world. A lot of continents are heavily armed. Europe is the most heavily armed, of course. There was a recent report from ECLAC which indicated that for every dollar spent on arms only a ...

LITTLEJOHNS: ECLAC - that's the European Commission ...

DHANAPALA: European Commission of Latin America and Caribbean -- Economic Commission -- was spending about a dollar per head on arms while only a dollar nineteen was spent on economic needs. So there is an imbalance still with regard to the amount of money spent on military expenditures.

LITTLEJOHNS: So what it gets down to is that the fact that the Cold War has ended has not reduced the suspicions among States which makes for this what they feel to be necessary military preparedness.

DHANAPALA: Well, of course the situation has become more complex. We have twenty-five conflicts for example in 1997 all of them being intra-state conflicts essentially, except for what is going on at the moment, of course, where there are some other conflicts that have persisted from the past like the India-Pakistan problem. But of course, we have to bear in mind that while arms themselves do not cause conflicts, they really are the oxygen that is brought to fan a spark into a fire and this is precisely why we need to have arms control and arms limitation and to do what countries like Mali has done to actually destroy weapons, in order that there will not be a recognizance of conflict in a post-conflict situation.

LITTLEJOHNS: But Mali was never perhaps a very serious threat to ....

DHANAPALA: No, Mali had an internal conflict and what it did as part and parcel of its conflict resolution was to have this bonfire which really became the flame of peace and there is a book published by UNIDIR - the UN Institute of Disarmament Research - which documents this dramatic story. And we want to do something similar in Albania. I lead an Evaluation Mission at the request of the Albanian Government in June of this year, where we looked into the question of weapons collection because last year, in a situation of civil unrest, the people of Albania had taken away a lot of arms -- 650,000 to be exact -- from Government

depots and the task of recovering those weapons is something which the Government would very much like to do because it is, of course, very de-stabilizing particularly in a situation where Albania is in the process of establishing its democracy and good governance and so on. And so we were asked to help and we have devised a programme in which UNDP is very much involved with the pilot project that has just been launched.

PENKETH: Why was it so necessary then to resuscitate this Department in New York because after all the main UN Disarmament Forum is in Geneva? It's the Conference on Disarmament and the decision was quite actually controversial to reinstate a little department here. How do you work with the Geneva structure?

DHANAPALA: Well, first and foremost, the Department of Disarmament Affairs services both the deliberative organs of the United Nations and the negotiating organ. The negotiating body, the Conference on Disarmament is, as you say, located in Geneva. But we have the Disarmament Commission meeting here as well as the First Committee of the General Assembly plus the fact that being in New York, you are close to the decision-making centre of the United Nations. The Secretary-General would like to have the advice of the Department of Disarmament Affairs as readily available as possible. It was also here in 1982 to 1992 when the Department existed before and there was, therefore, no fundamental change. What happened was that between 1992 and the beginning of this year we were a centre of disarmament affairs within the Department of Political Affairs and it has now been re-established as a Department of Disarmament Affairs.

LITTLEJOHNS: So why was it done – created – at that time, 1992?

DHANAPALA: Well, that was a decision that was taken by the previous Secretary-General and ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Boutros-Ghali.

DHANAPALA: That is correct ... and Mr. Kofi Annan has described that as a mistake. He's on record of saying that and he has saw to rectify that.

WILLIAMS: Speaking of mistakes, most of Albania's recent history seem to have been a bad mistake. And that's every where of looking at it. The present situation in Albania or neighbouring Kosovo sort of epitomize the political problems you face in a sense that while you're now having in trade something to disarm the Albanians and map up these weapons just to cross the border Belgrade, with a lot of heavy weaponry, is attacking the Albanians' cousins in Kosovo and I would imagine a lot of Albanians would see this as a means to disarm the already weak and ill-defended in the face of high technical aggression – almost a rerun of the Bosnian situation. So, will your programmes still go ahead under those circumstances?

DHANAPALA: When I went in June, the Kosovo situation is already in full spate and surprisingly, I found a national consensus of both the need to collect the weapons that have been taken away from the government depots. The opposition leader, Sili Berisha, whom I met, the leadership of the government, NGOs, and many other parliamentarians and other sections of Albania society, were quite clear in their view that there were two separate problems. And so this issue about recovering weapons that were in the hands of civilians, unauthorized possession, was seen as quite distinct from the problem of Kosovo.

WILLIAMS: On a broader picture, though, when we're talking about disarmament, there's always the case of looking in a disadvantage, both on the nuclear and small arms field. So coming from the South Asian Continent yourself, you're well aware that the justification that both the Indians and the Pakistanis use for not going along with nuclear disarmament moves was because as long as five declared and one undeclared nuclear power existed in the world, who are making no serious steps to disarmament, why should they? Who you referenced to -- concentrate on here -- the South Asians or the original five plus one if we include the Israelis as an undeclared weapon state?

DHANAPALA: The UN task, of course, is to try to achieve common security at the lowest level of arms and in doing so, we would like all countries, despite the fact that they have the sovereign right to self defence and to acquire arms in the protection of their national security, to try to minimize its expenditure on arms and we would like to see, as a matter of fact, nuclear disarmament. This is not only written into existing treaties like Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but it is there in the final document of the First Special Session on Disarmament of 1978 which is a consensus document. And so there are a number of agreements to which Member States have subscribed to and we are there to urge them to fulfill those commitments. Now, of course, there are situations where countries feel that the acquisition of nuclear arms -- of additional conventional arms – is in their national interest. And what we must therefore do is to try to eliminate firstly the political sources of conflict and also to, at the same time, reduce armaments so that these political conflicts are not exacerbated, but that there are peaceful means of solving them in accordance with the Charter.

PENKETH: To come back to Ian's point, it does keep coming up in Geneva and this Disarmament Forum that the Big Five have not lived up to their disarmament commitments, which are after all in Treaties. How much longer do you think they can go on doing this? Is pressure now building on them to make some sort of concessions in the wake of the Pakistanis and nuclear ...

DHANAPALA: Oh yes, there is enormous pressure. I was a member of the Canberra Commission which sought the elimination of nuclear weapons and there has been a

movement in the NGO community across the world for the abolition of nuclear weapons. We have a number of treaties that continue to urge these countries to get rid of the nuclear weapons. I think the pressure is building up. The 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference had a package of decisions which clearly call for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons as a goal. Now, we must concede that there has been a substantial reduction in nuclear weapons from the period when the Cold War was at its height. We've had Start 1. We've had Start 2. And we've had the Yeltsin/Clinton Agreement of last year which will go on to reduce nuclear weapons as time goes on. But of course at the moment there is a lull in the implementation of these agreements because we have not had the ratification of Start 2 by the Russian Federation's Duma. But pending that, there is a great deal of pressure for a number of steps such as de-alerting of nuclear weapons in order to reduce the risk of nuclear war. Now, mind you, what happened in South Asia does not help. We know that both those countries were not members of the MPTO -- the CTBT. So what they did ...

LITTLEJOHNS: The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

DHANAPALA: The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. ...and it did not help that they went ahead, but exactly was a alarm signal to the rest of the world, and I think more and more have realized that we cannot have more Nuclear Weapon States, that it really does not help global security to increase the number of States. We have got to proceed in the other direction of reducing the number of nuclear weapons and reducing the number of nuclear weapon States.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Jayantha Dhanapala, UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs.

Ambassador Dhanapala, the production of weapons is, of course, a very profitable industry. Is there anything that you or the UN can do to dissuade or to reduce the efforts of salesmanship of the producers of weapons? Are you in contact with them at all?

DHANAPALA: Well, we have two mechanisms which my Department undertakes. One is a conventional arms register which has seven categories of weapons, where the imports and the exports of these weapons are reported to us.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this a mandatory thing ... I mean, are they obliged to do that?

DHANAPALA: This is completely voluntary and we have over 90 countries now participating in this register. But it is a start.

LITTLEJOHNS: Including the United States?

DHANAPALA: Including the United States. And this is a start because it helps transparency. And with transparency comes confidence building and hopefully this incentive to increasing the amount of arms that are traded. We also have a standardized instrument for

the reporting of military expenditure and with the help of the World Bank, and the IMF and other economic agencies which do similar monitoring of military expenditure, we are trying to refine that and again we have a number of Member States reporting to us what their military expenditure is in order to have precisely the kind of this incentive towards increased military expenditure. But in addition to that, through our regional centres in Lima, in Lome, and in Kathmandu, we conduct seminars. We have confidence building seminars and measures which try to persuade countries that arms expenditures should be reduced in order to build confidence amongst themselves and have a peaceful solutions to their political problems.

LITTLEJOHNS: And are you having some success in this area?

DHANAPALA: Well, things are slow. We already, as I said, have had some success because the world military expenditure, even at some hundred and forty billion dollars today, is not nearly as high as the trillion dollars it was at the peak of World War II. Sometimes these reductions are caused by economic constraints. It's happened in Southeast Asia following the financial melt down there. It's happened in the Russian Federation because of their own economic woes. But at other times it is as a result of voluntary acts. I mean, Costa Rica does not have any military expenditure, nor does Iceland. So there are some countries that have set very good examples and we hope that more countries will follow them.

WILLIAMS: Do you have a sword into plow shares routine because, for example, if the United States, which has significantly reduced its present military expenditure without putting more money into the economy, will probably cause a major recession. Congress has a major motive for producing – for insisting on money going to weapon system that the Pentagon does not want like the B1s delta bomber, which they carried on producing long after the Pentagon said they didn't want anymore, thank you, because it was a major employer in California -- and a major contributor in Washington.

DHANAPALA: Well it is a fallacy that the stopping of military expenditure is going to cause an economic recession or hardship to particular communities. For the long time, conversion has been the way in which we have adjusted to this situation, particularly with the end of the Cold War.

LITTLEJOHNS: What kind of conversion?

DHANAPALA: Conversion of military industry into civilian industry.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean instead of producing guns, they produce refrigerators?

DHANAPALA: Something like that. In other words, you can always re-adjust your economy in order to do this. And in Bonn, they have a International Conversion Institute which has specialized in this. And in UNIDIR, we published a number of studies precisely on this. ILO has done the same thing ...

LITTLEJOHNS: International Labour Organization.

DHANAPALA: International Labour Organization ... with regard to the way in which skilled manpower can be switched from one military industry into a civilian industry. It can be done. And it has been done. So, I think, these fears that have been expressed, have been expressed because of vested interest.

PENKETH: Ambassador, in addition to your day job, you're also the Head of the Special Group and ...

DHANAPALA: That's my night job.

PENKETH: Oh? ... you're inspecting the Presidential Sites in Iraq. You just went once. Currently, Iraq is not cooperating with the UN Inspectors but when you went you just seem to be in a complete circus and, of course, nothing was found. Are there plans to go back again and how will that happen?

DHANAPALA: Well, as you know my function as Head of the Special Group is limited to visits to the Presidential Sites. And the determination as to when those visits should take place or whether they should take place is entirely done by Richard Butler, who is the Head of UNSCOM and by the IAEA. So they let me know when there is a need for a visit to a presidential site and then I nominate a group of senior diplomats to accompany me or designate a representative of myself to visit those sites.

PENKETH: Would you expect the same number of diplomats to get back with you another time.

DHANAPALA: No, because on the first occasion, we visited all eight Presidential Sites that were described in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Secretary-General and Tareq Aziz. And so we needed twenty senior diplomats for that task. I don't think that we will repeat that exercise again. We will probably, if at all, visit far fewer than the eight, probably because UNSCOM has specific need to visit one or two of the Presidential Sites and so we would have reduced number of diplomats on that occasion.

WILLIAMS: Well it's a sad fact that your sight is to looking for nuclear, chemical and biological warfare but to the headline grabbers that you mentioned earlier, 500 million small arms and most of the deaths since World War II have been low-technology deaths. Far more people have been killed in almost two conflicts sometimes even by bludgeoning and bayoneting rather than by .... how do you control that level of weaponry?

DHANAPALA: Well, small arms has become an increasingly important agenda item in disarmament and we are working very strenuously with regard to that. We have taken initiatives ourselves. Last year there was a report by a panel of governmental experts presented to the General Assembly and this year there is a follow-on to that and they will report next year

to the General Assembly.

WILLIAMS: If I may discuss the National Rifle Association -- the American group -- is it now affiliated to the UN as an NGO?

DHANAPALA: Yes. They have had a dialogue with me and there is no fundamental conflict because we are not entering into the question of domestic gun control. We are talking about cross-boundary transfers and the use of arms manufactured to military specifications in international conflicts. So there is in fact no difference of opinion as far as we are concerned here. But we have worked very hard on this issue and in the UN system, my Department has been designated by the Secretary-General as a focal point and we have established a mechanism -- the Coordinating Action on Small Arms, we call it CASA another UN acronym to add to your collection -- in order to try to have some kind of information sharing amongst the UN system to try to identify who has a comparative advantage in what area and so we are all working together as a team. We had our first meeting in August of this year and we intend to meet regularly and work together with the Non-Governmental Organizations working in the field. Our first target is to have an international conference to control illicit trafficking of small arms because that was identified as a very important problem by the report that was submitted last year by this panel of governmental experts and Switzerland has offered Geneva as a venue for this conference in the year 2000. Much will depend on the General Assembly discussion of this issue at the end of this year as to when this Conference will be held but I think there is a global consensus for it. So this is the beginning of tackling that problem.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, we have about 90 seconds left. We haven't touched on the problem -- the terrible problem in fact -- of landmines. What can you tell us about progress in that area?

DHANAPALA: Well, as you know the Ottawa process resulted in this Treaty which has been signed by over 129 countries ...

LITTLEJOHNS: But the United States is not happy with it.

DHANAPALA: The United States has not signed it so have a number of other important countries but the number of countries required for this to enter into force is expected to be reached in the Spring of next year and there will be a meeting of State Parties. The focal point for the Mine Action Service within the UN is the Department of Peace-keeping Operations but my Department has an important role to play in advocacy. We are hoping also to have a database on landmines but meanwhile in the Conference on Disarmament, there is also a discussion going on in order to try to negotiate a treaty to prevent the transfer of landmines which will complement the Ottawa Treaty.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is there any kind of follow-up apart from that that's going to perhaps make this thing more effective?

DHANAPALA: Yes, I think through the Mine Action Service plus the NGO Community and the meetings which the Parties to the Ottawa process will be having, there is a follow-up that is going on very actively.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guest has been Jayantha Dhanapala, UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of *The Nation* and Anne Penketh of *Agence-France Presse*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**